

## **Warmer: The Warmth of One (Acts 16)**

Chris Altrock - 2/11/18

### The Fire of a Flock

What brings you comfort? What makes you happy?

For a woman named Ventiko, it's a peacock.

That's right, a peacock.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps you caught Ventiko's story a few weeks ago. She is a photographer and performance artist in New York. She recently tried to board a flight in Newark with her peacock Dexter, claiming that the peacock was her emotional-support animal. She bought Dexter a ticket. She paid money for the peacock to sit next to her on the flight--because it's her comfort animal. He makes her happy when she's sad. He brings her comfort when she's anxious.

United Airlines refused to let her board the plane with Dexter. Although it might have brought her joy and comfort and emotional support, United rightly discerned that the bird's huge plumage, sharp beak and its loud "aaa-AAAA; aaa-AAA" would probably disrupt the rest of the airplane--leaving the remaining passengers discomfited and emotionally unsupported.

What brings your comfort? What makes you happy?

Centuries ago a man named Paul wrote a letter. Paul wrote 13 letters in our Bibles. This letter contained the word "joy" as a verb and as a noun 16 times. Again and again Paul wrote about what made him joyful, what brought him comfort, what made him happy. 16 times Paul's letter mentions joy.

And do you know what made Paul so joyful?

Not a peacock.

But a flock. A church.

Paul was writing to the church in the ancient city of Philippi. That's why we call his letter Philippians. And over and over Paul essentially says that he takes great joy in that church in Philippi. What makes Paul happy is not a peacock, but a flock. The church in Philippi:

*3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:3-11 ESV)*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2018/01/30/a-woman-tried-to-board-a-plane-with-her-emotional-support-peacock-united-wouldnt-let-it-fly/?utm\\_term=.5b0f4c4a7dc5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/animalia/wp/2018/01/30/a-woman-tried-to-board-a-plane-with-her-emotional-support-peacock-united-wouldnt-let-it-fly/?utm_term=.5b0f4c4a7dc5)

Such joy! Such comfort! Everytime Paul prays for them, it's with joy. Paul loves this church in Philippi! Paul "holds them in his heart." He "yearns for them with the affection of Christ."

Here's one of the things Paul is saying: *It brings great joy to experience the fire of a flock.* Paul is experiencing the joy that comes by belonging to a flock that is on fire, a congregation that is warm and intimate, a community that cares. There's something comforting about that. It brings great joy to experience the fire, the warmth, of a flock, a church, that truly cares, in the way this Philippian church cared.

An email recently came in to my Inbox. It simply said this:

*Just passing on how thankful we are for a loving church family that prays.*

There's someone who is experiencing the joy of the fire of this flock. The joy of a community that cares.

### Koinonia

Paul uses a specific word three times in this letter to point to the warmth and intimacy he experienced and noticed in the Philippian church. It's the word *koinonia*. We might translate that word "fellowship" or "communion" or "community." Paul uses it three times in this letter. He writes about *koinonia* with Christ, with the Spirit, and with each other. *The fire in the Philippian flock was expressed in "koinonia" with Christ, the Spirit, and each other.*

In chapter 2 Paul writes of their *koinonia* with the Spirit:

*1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy (Phil. 2:1 ESV)*

The word "participation" is the word *koinonia*. Paul is acknowledging that they do indeed have a fellowship with, a sharing together with, a close association with the Holy Spirit. That's what the church is. It is a community that shares *koinonia* with the Spirit.

In chapter 3 Paul writes of *koinonia* with Christ:

*10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Phil. 3:10 ESV)*

The word "share" is the word *koinonia*. Paul's confessing his ultimate desire--to have deep and lasting sharing in and associating with Christ--even the sufferings of Christ. That's what the church is. It is a community that is so close with Jesus that it longs to have fellowship even with the suffering and pain of Jesus.

But in Chapter 1 Paul writes of the *koinonia* that exists between the church and himself:

*3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1:3-5 ESV)*

The word "partnership" is the word *koinonia*. Paul is celebrating how he and the church share in a fellowship, a deep and intimate association. And this is what he thinks of as he prays for them. He overflows with happiness as he thinks of them because of their *koinonia* with one another.

*The fire in the Philippian flock was expressed in the “koinonia” with Christ, the Spirit, and each other. And it brought Paul great joy. It brings great joy to experience the fire of a flock. There’s nothing like experiencing a church that really cares.*

### The Warmth of One

Where did this amazingly warm church come from? After all, most of us can share stories of churches that are just the opposite. We’ve heard of or we’ve experienced churches that were insensitive, inhospitable, unwelcoming, judgemental and unkind.

The story of this church goes back to just one person. A woman. Her name is Lydia:  
*11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16:11-15 ESV)*

The “we” here is Paul (the author of that letter *Philippians*), Silas and Luke (the author of *Acts* and *The Gospel According to Luke*). They make their way on their mission work to the city of Philippi. And they run into Lydia.<sup>2</sup> Lydia is also the name of the region where her hometown Thyatira is.

Culturally, Lydia is an insider. She’s a big business success. The description of Lydia as a “dealer in purple cloth” may indicate that she worked either with purple textiles or purple dye.<sup>3</sup> Thyatira was known for its trade guilds, including those devoted to clothiers and dyers, and Lydian women had long been associated with purple dyeing. An ancient inscription indicates the presence of a guild of purple merchants in Philippi. Lydia’s participation in this trade may have prompted her relocation to Philippi.

Purple dye of the highest quality was painstakingly extracted from the murex shell and its rarity made purple goods a coveted luxury associated with royalty, wealth, and high position. Lydia dealt in this coveted consumer good. It would have made her an insider.

Lydia’s ability to offer lodging in her home to numerous guests indicate that her wealth exceeded that of the average Macedonian of the time. It is not clear that Lydia’s home in Philippi was her primary residence. As a wealthy merchant, she could have maintained her main home in

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<sup>2</sup>Devine, A., & Ayayo, K. G. (2016). Lydia of Thyatira. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>3</sup>Devine, A., & Ayayo, K. G. (2016). Lydia of Thyatira. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Thyatira and a secondary home in Philippi for business purposes. Her wealth would have made her an insider.

Culturally, Lydia is an insider--very successful.

Spiritually, Lydia is an outsider. Lydia is called in v. 14 “a worshiper of God.” This is a technical term in Acts for someone who is a Gentile who had adopted elements of Jewish belief and practice but had not become a full proselyte.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when it comes to her spiritual community, she’s not a true insider. She’s still, at some level, on the outside of the Jewish faith.

In addition, Lydia is worshiping at “a place of prayer.” This word is a term used in Acts to refer to a place of worship that is NOT a synagogue. That is, while Lydia is in Philippi doing business, she decides she wants to go to worship. But she finds there is no Jewish synagogue where she can belong. So she goes to a place of prayer, a place where those with Jewish interests might gather. There, she finds some other women.<sup>5</sup> Thus, she’s an outsider here in Philippi in the sense that she can’t even find a formal house of worship.

So, notice what happens when Paul and Silas and Luke come and teach her about Jesus and she’s baptized. (Notice that her household is baptized. This would include children, extended family, slaves, and business associates). What’s Lydia’s first move? What’s the first thing Lydia does after learning about Jesus and being baptized? She invites these missionaries into her home. In essence, she starts a church.

We know this because at the end of Acts 16, when enemies of the Christian faith in Philippi want to run the trio out of town, Paul and Silas stop by Lydia’s house in Philippi and visit the brother’s there (Acts 16:40). *The brothers*. That means the people who had become Christians and who had banded together into a church. They were now meeting at Lydia’s house. Lydia’s house had become the meeting place of the church. Lydia, the outsider, had created a warm and welcoming place for those in Philippi who came to know Christ.

As we follow the story in Acts 16, this would have included a slave girl abused by her owners. This would have included a jailer and his household whom Paul and Silas led to faith in Christ. These and many others were welcomed into Lydia’s household.

*Because Lydia was welcomed by Jesus at his table, Lydia welcomed others at her table.* Lydia, this woman who was such an insider in her business culture, but such an outsider spiritually, was warmly welcomed by the Jesus she learned of him through Paul, Silas and Luke. That’s why her very first move after hearing about Jesus and experiencing the warm love of Jesus, was to invite these missionaries into her second home in Philippi and then to turn that home into a church that became the warm church we see in the letter to the Philippians. It was

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<sup>4</sup> Devine, A., & Ayayo, K. G. (2016). Lydia of Thyatira. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>5</sup> In the 36 obvious references to a synagogue in Acts (e.g., Acts 6:9; 18:4, 15, 23; 18:4, 19; 22:19), the author uses συναγωγή (*synagōgē*) exclusively. For this reason, προσευχήν (*proseuchēn*) in Acts 16:13 likely refers to an informal prayer gathering; Devine, A., & Ayayo, K. G. (2016). Lydia of Thyatira. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Lydia's way of responding to the warmth of Christ. Because Lydia was welcomed by Jesus at his table, she wanted to find a way to welcome others at her table.

That's what all this talk of hospitality comes down to. We want to become a warmer church because we've all been welcomed at the table of Jesus. And this is just one of the ways we respond to that.

And what's remarkable is that this one woman's efforts then gave birth to an entire church that was warm and inviting. *The fire of this flock in Philippi grew from the warmth of just one.* One person named Lydia demonstrated warmth and welcome. And that led to an entire church that was warm and welcoming.

Your one act of warmth and welcome can be the spark that sets this whole church aflame. When you come to Highland and you greet a guest, you pray and park, you practice each one greet one, you practice the ten foot rule, you take a new member out to lunch, and you practice the same kind of hospitality out there, and you make your home a welcoming place, there's no telling what God will do. Because the fire of this flock grew from the warmth of just one. God used the efforts of this one person to give birth to an entire community that was warm and inviting. And when you demonstrate love and warmth, just you, God can take that and multiply it. He can turn this whole church on fire through you. He can turn your whole neighborhood on fire through you. He can warm up your whole workplace through you. He can warm up your whole school through you.

This week, don't underestimate the warmth of just one. Just one person. Just one act of love and hospitality. Think of Lydia and her role in starting this fiery flock in Philippi. Think of the warmth of just one. And decide to be the one.